



Have We Forgotten the Path to Peace?

By Jimmy Carter, New York Times, May 27, 1999

After the cold war, many expected that the world would enter an era of unprecedented peace and prosperity. Those who live in developed nations might think this is the case today, with the possible exception of the war in Kosovo. But at the Carter Center we monitor all serious conflicts in the world, and the reality is that the number of such wars has increased dramatically.

One reason is that the United Nations was designed to deal with international conflicts, and almost all the current ones are civil wars in developing countries. This creates a peacemaking vacuum that is most often filled by powerful nations that concentrate their attention on conflicts that affect them, like those in Iraq, Bosnia and Serbia. While the war in Kosovo rages and dominates the world's headlines, even more destructive conflicts in developing nations are systematically ignored by the United States and other powerful nations.

One can traverse Africa, from the Red Sea in the northeast to the southwestern Atlantic coast, and never step on peaceful territory. Fifty thousand people have recently perished in the war between Eritrea and Ethiopia, and almost two million have died during the 16-year conflict in neighboring Sudan. That war has now spilled into northern Uganda, whose troops have joined those from Rwanda to fight in the Democratic Republic of Congo (formerly Zaire). The other Congo (Brazzaville) is also ravaged by civil war, and all attempts to bring peace to Angola have failed. Although formidable commitments are being made in the Balkans, where white Europeans are involved, no such concerted efforts are being made by leaders outside of Africa to resolve the disputes. This gives the strong impression of racism.

Because of its dominant role in the UN Security Council and NATO, the United States tends to orchestrate global peacemaking. Unfortunately, many of these efforts are seriously flawed. We have become increasingly inclined to sidestep the time-tested premises of negotiation, which in most cases prevent deterioration of a bad situation and at least offer the prospect of a bloodless solution. Abusive leaders can best be induced by the simultaneous threat of consequences and the promise of reward - at least legitimacy within the international community.

The approach the United States has taken recently has been to devise a solution that best suits its own purposes, recruit at least tacit support in whichever forum it can best influence, provide the dominant military force, present an ultimatum to recalcitrant parties and then take punitive action against the entire nation to force compliance.

The often tragic result of this final decision is that already oppressed citizens suffer, while the oppressor may feel free of further consequences if he perpetrates even worse crimes. Through control of the news media, he is often made to seem heroic by defending his homeland against foreign aggression and shifting blame for economic or political woes away from himself.

Our general purposes are admirable: to enhance peace, freedom, democracy, human rights and economic progress. But this flawed approach is now causing unwarranted suffering and strengthening unsavory regimes in several countries, including Sudan, Cuba, Iraq and - the most

troubling example - Serbia. There, the international community has admirable goals of protecting the rights of Kosovars and ending the brutal policies of Slobodan Milosevic. But the decision to attack the entire nation has been counterproductive, and our destruction of civilian life has now become senseless and excessively brutal. There is little indication of success after more than 25,000 sorties and 14,000 missiles and bombs, 4,000 of which were not precision guided.

The expected few days of aerial attacks have now lengthened into months, while more than a million Kosovars have been forced from their homes, many never to return even under the best of circumstances. As the American-led force has expanded targets to inhabited areas and resorted to the use of anti-personnel cluster bombs, the result has been damage to hospitals, offices and residences of a half-dozen ambassadors, and the killing of hundreds of innocent civilians and an untold number of conscripted troops.

Instead of focusing on Serbian military forces, missiles and bombs are now concentrating on the destruction of bridges, railways, roads, electric power, and fuel and fresh water supplies. Serbian citizens report that they are living like cavemen, and their torment increases daily. Realizing that we must save face but cannot change what has already been done, NATO leaders now have three basic choices: to continue bombing ever more targets until Yugoslavia (including Kosovo and Montenegro) is almost totally destroyed, to rely on Russia to resolve our dilemma through indirect diplomacy, or to accept American casualties by sending military forces into Kosovo.

So far, we are following the first, and worst, option -- and seem to be moving toward including the third. Despite earlier denials by American and other leaders, the recent decision to deploy a military force of 50,000 troops on the Kosovo border confirms that the use of ground troops will be necessary to assure the return of expelled Albanians to their homes.

How did we end up in this quagmire? We have ignored some basic principles that should be applied to the prevention or resolution of all conflicts:

- Short-circuiting the long-established principles of patient negotiation leads to war, not peace.
- Bypassing the Security Council weakens the United Nations and often alienates permanent members who may be helpful in influencing warring parties.
- The exclusion of nongovernmental organizations from peacemaking precludes vital "second track" opportunities for resolving disputes.
- Ignoring serious conflicts in Africa and other underdeveloped regions deprives these people of justice and equal rights.
- Even the most severe military or economic punishment of oppressed citizens is unlikely to force their oppressors to yield to American demands.
- The United States' insistence on the use of cluster bombs, designed to kill or maim humans, is condemned almost universally and brings discredit on our nation (as does our refusal to support a ban on land mines).
- Even for the world's only superpower, the ends don't always justify the means.

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